

Juvenile Justice

According to data from the Tennessee Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (TCFFCJ), 1998 registered only a 3 percent increase from calendar year 1997 in the number of children referred to juvenile courts. While some of the increase in the rate of referrals is the result of improved training and competence of reporting staff, 41 of Tennessee's 98 juvenile courts verified that they saw fewer children in 1998 than in 1997. In 1998 Tennessee's juvenile courts served 69,941 children.

The juvenile courts with the largest number of children referred and disposed were located in the four urban areas: Shelby County/Memphis (leading the state with 16,369), Davidson County/Nashville, Hamilton County/Chattanooga, and Knox County/Knoxville.

The most common reasons children are referred to juvenile courts are delinquent offenses, unruly/status offenses, and dependent/neglect cases. A delinquent offense is an action committed by a juvenile that is in violation of law. Examples of delinquent offenses are traffic violations or vandalism. A status offense is an action that if committed by an adult would not be considered illegal. Examples of status offenses include violation of curfew, truancy, ungovernable behavior, unruly behavior, or running away from home. Children who are found to be dependent/neglect are not receiving proper care from their caregivers or are actually being abused by their caregivers.

**Disproportionate Minority
Confinement for Selected Counties
1998**

County	Percent of Population	Percent Represented in Juvenile Court Statistics
Davidson	31.6	58
Fayette	52.8	65
Hardeman	47.9	56
Haywood	58.9	78
Madison	40.5	62
Shelby	55	78

Source: Tennessee Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges. *Note: Percentages represent data on all minorities.

What Works

- The data from the *Fight Crime* report suggests that a strong need for after-school programs exists for all children. Quality after school programs can reduce crime by:
 - Offering responsible adult supervision,
 - Constructive activities, and
 - Insulation from dangerous influences.
- It also offers children the opportunity to be impacted by positive attitudes and values of the caretaking adults, as well as learning useful skills.
- The *Fight Crime: Invest in Kids* report also discussed developmental risks for latchkey children and youth, including their significantly greater risk of truancy, receiving poor grades, and risk-taking behavior including substance abuse. "Eighth graders who were unsupervised for eleven or more hours per week were twice as likely to abuse drugs or alcohol as those under adult supervision." This report makes clear the critical need for improved after-school programming for children.

Some juvenile cases are processed informally in juvenile court through pretrial diversion or informal adjustments. This involves a voluntary agreement between the court, the child, and the parents. A formal court trial is avoided, but the seriousness of the problem is addressed. In 1998 11.6 percent of all referrals to juvenile court were suitable for informal adjustment, with 4.1 percent being dealt with through pretrial diversion (which requires prior judicial approval of the agreement), and 7.5 percent addressed through an informal adjustment.